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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 000174

DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/S
ADDISS ABABA FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV EAID EFIN BC ZI SADC

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE, SADC, THE WEST -- WHO OWNS THE STORE?

REF: PRETORIA 427

Classified By: DCM Philip R. Drouin; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Phandu Skelemani convoked resident G-8 Missions France, Germany, Japan, the U.S. and the UK as well as the EU on March 6 to brief on current GOB thinking on Zimbabwe and Sudan (septel). He and President Khama had "had a chat" earlier in the day and discussed, inter alia, the financial pressures confronting Zimbabwe. Citing GOZ Finance Minister Tendai Biti's appeal at the February 26-27 SADC Council of Ministers meeting in Cape Town (reftel) for a financial rescue package for Zimbabwe (\$5 billion total, \$2 billion right away), Skelemani acknowledged that there was much sentiment within SADC member states to look to international donors and the IFIs to bail out the sinking ship in Zimbabwe. However, the GOB recognizes that the actions and words of some elements in Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity, notably ZANU-PF, are making it hard for the international community to re-engage and lend a helping hand financially to the troubled people of Zimbabwe. Skelemani also shared with us a March 5 MFA press release on this subject (text at paragraph 5).

¶2. (C) The rebuttal from G-8 diplomats was universal and predictable, with the UK High Commissioner and EU Ambassador stressing there will be no change from them on financial flows to the GOZ or lifting of sanctions, or their support for Zimbabwe-related initiatives within the Bretton Woods institutions, until there is tangible evidence of positive change and good governance in Harare. The DCM echoed much of this sentiment and added that the United States continues to focus on humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe and remains the largest contributor of food aid there. The DCM also noted that about six years ago, then SecState Powell had counselled President Bush (referring to the Pottery Barn's policy) that if the United States broke Iraq, "we would own it." All would attest to American ownership of the current situation in Iraq, and we continue to work to address and fix the problem. However, to those Americans (and others) who follow the sorrow of a broken Zimbabwe, it sure looks like SADC owns this Mugabe-driven mess and must accept responsibility for its resolution.

¶3. (C) Comment: While Botswana continues its lonely advocacy within SADC, Skelemani recognizes that the GOB also acquiesced in the less-than-perfect, "best deal possible at the time" Global Political Agreement that is proving to be a bear to implement. Skelemani agreed with us that by its insistence to have the parties sign in Zimbabwe (with many putting pressure on MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai), SADC has

essentially bought and owns the store and the conundrum for the sub-region that is Zimbabwe, and it needs to do everything it can to fix the problem. Other SADC member states are less enthusiastic about this necessity, and it is not surprising to us that SADC is now seeking to shift the onus, costs, and title to this bill of goods they have helped to create. The Foreign Minister nodded and took our point that "Extraordinary" SADC Summits (another is in the offing, time and venue TBD) are increasingly viewed as "less than ordinary" elsewhere in the international community, especially when Zimbabwe is on the agenda.

¶4. (C) Comment Continued: As a tragic epilogue to all this, later on March 6 Zimbabwean Prime Morgan Tsvangirai was injured in a road accident in Zimbabwe, in which his wife was killed. The GOB Chief of Protocol told Emboff on March 7 that Foreign Minister Skelemani went to Harare on Saturday to visit with Tsvangirai in the hospital. We have since seen CNN and BBC reports that Tsvangirai has traveled to Botswana to convalesce. Tsvangirai was a frequent visitor to Gaborone during much of 2008. When driving by the GOB's main guest house (just down the street from SADC Secretariat headquarters) on a quiet March 8 Sunday afternoon in Gaborone, we could see many cars parked there, with security officials and staffers standing out front, just like when Tsvangirai has come calling here in the past. End Comment.

¶5. (U) Begin Text of GOB MFA Press Release:

Gaborone, March 05, 2009 -- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation welcomes the release on bail of some of the MDC activists arrested over allegations of plots of banditry and terrorism. The Ministry, however, remains concerned that the continued detention of the remaining MDC activists and the Deputy Minister of Agriculture-designate, Mr. Roy Bennett can only serve to undermine the implementation of the Global Political Agreement and efforts to attract international goodwill and the much needed economic, financial and technical assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the economy in Zimbabwe.

For as long as some elements in government, notably, ZANU PF, continue to encourage and engage in irresponsible acts and make provocative statements, the international community is unlikely to extend a helping hand and to re-engage Zimbabwe for the benefit of its long suffering people.

The Government of the Republic of Botswana calls upon ZANU PF to end unilateralism and create an atmosphere conducive to building mutual trust and confidence as well as to live up to the spirit of the Global Political Agreement wherein the parties committed themselves to bring an end to polarization, divisions, conflict and intolerance which has characterised Zimbabwean politics and society in the recent past.

End Text of Press Release.

NOLAN